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S E R M O N

PREACHED BEFORE THE
C L E R G Y
OF THE
ARCHDEACONRY OF ELY,

JULY 7, 1784,

AND PUBLISHED BY THE DESIRE OF
THE RIGHT REVEREND THE
LORD BISHOP OF LLANDAFF,

BY THE
REV. T. PARKINSON, M.A. 1772
FELLOW OF CHRIST'S COLLEGE.

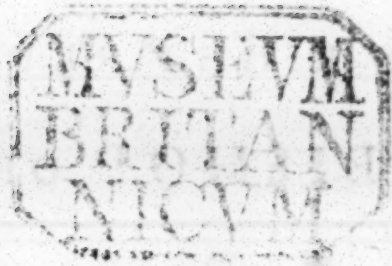
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TO THE RIGHT REVEREND
THE LORD BISHOP OF LLANDAFF,

THE FOLLOWING SERMON

IS,

WITH GREAT RESPECT,

INSCRIBED

BY HIS LORDSHIP'S

MOST OBEDIENT HUMBLE SERVANT,

&c.

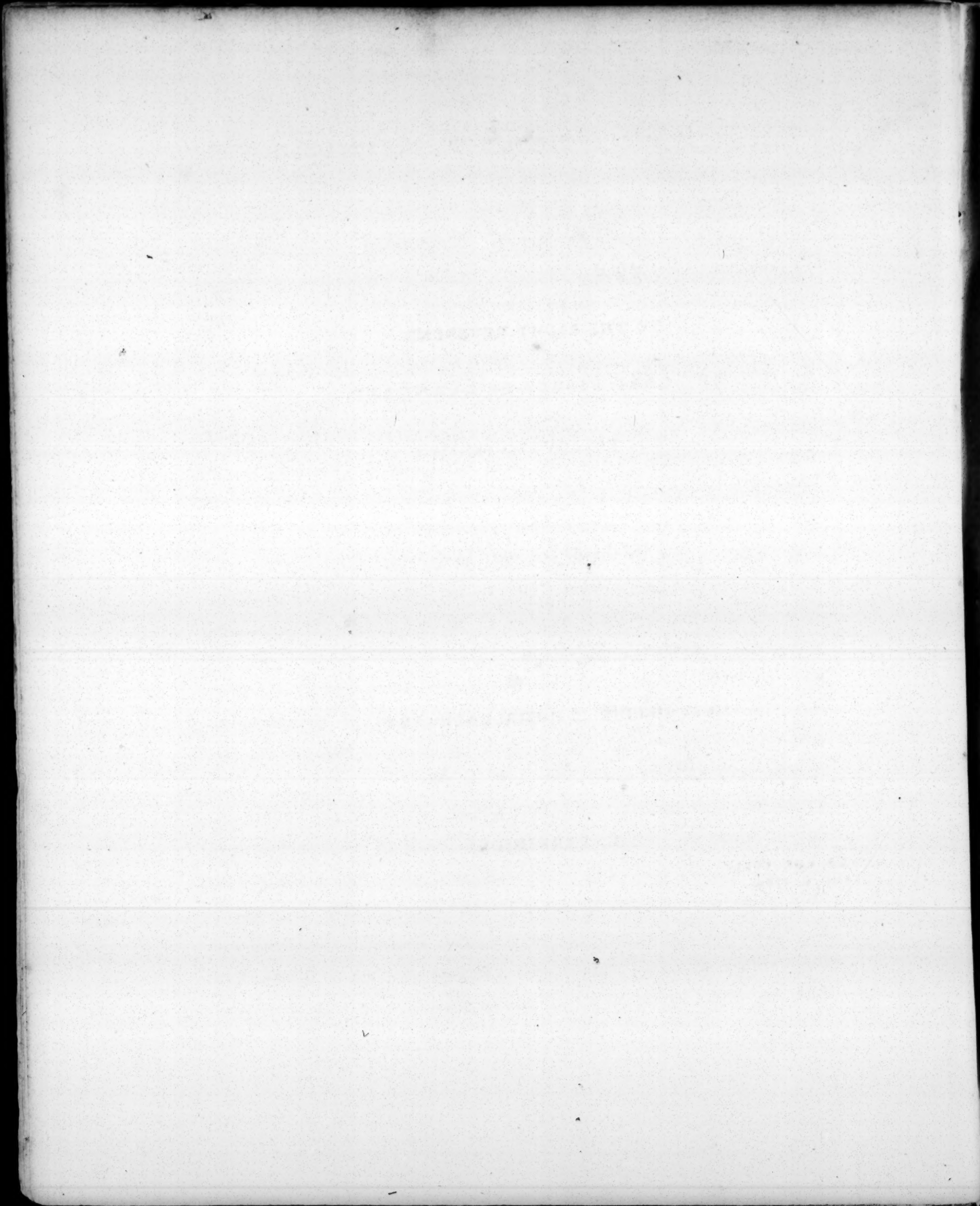
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T. PARKINSON..

CAMB. CHR. COLL.
AUG. 6, 1784.

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M A T T H. xxiv. 12.

AND BECAUSE INIQUITY SHALL ABOUND, THE LOVE OF MANY
SHALL WAX COLD.

OUR Saviour foresaw, and described, in the clearest and most unequivocal language, the divine vengeance suspended over Jerusalem; and this passage is contained in his prophetic description of the inhumanity and outrage which would attend the execution of this vengeance in the destruction of the city, and the final dissolution of the Jewish government. But the observation in the text is not confined to this individual event, being included in an universal law of nature, and descriptive of mankind in all ages and countries. Every violation of the principles imposed, by the great Creator, for the government and benefit of the physical and moral world, is immediately apparent by an introduction of pernicious effects, and naturally facilitates the admission of farther violation, and farther disorders gradually progressive to anarchy and destruction. The laws, obtaining in the material world, conspire, by a secret and undiscoverable connection, to the same benevolent purpose, and a change or subversion of the least important, would proportionably affect or annihilate the utility of the rest, and spread wide desolation beyond the reach of human prevention; or, where effects are obedient to the controul of man, solicited by the strongest

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instinctive desires, we see that an uncultivated field is not only overspread with weeds and unproductive of useful fruits, but idleness and inaction diffuse the calamity, and naturally produce bodily infirmity, and a total incapacity of contributing to the preservation of life. And, by the influence of the same principle, an uncultivated mind is not only subject to narrow and illiberal sentiments, prejudices and superstitions, but, from a feebleness of the understanding, adventitious indeed and induced by an attachment to levity and trifles, yet confirmed and naturalized by long habit, utterly incapable of any laborious mental exertions to remove these evils, and substitute, in their place, just opinions, and useful acquirements. A wound does not more naturally disorder the body, than false opinions disable and warp the judgement, and vicious indulgencies corrupt the heart. A solitary abuse, either in opinion or practice, is very rarely known; for one false opinion gives a wrong direction to the understanding, upon every subject connected with it, and it is certainly less capable of clear discernment, and just reasoning, under the influence of this bias, than before its existence. And the several vices and abuses seem not only to be combined in a general alliance to produce mischief, and counteract the benevolent designs of providence; but, like an extensive family, the good and ill success of each is felt with mutual and tender sympathy: the defeat of one leading vice disarms the rest, or renders their approach difficult and almost inaccessible; and, where one is in full possession of the soul, its influence affects every spring and motive of action,

action, and is diffused, like a baneful poison, through the whole system, with different degrees of malignity, according to their near or remote affinity with the part infected. The tendency of some abuses to strengthen themselves, and beget others, is very conspicuous. Free-thinking is seldom contented with controverting a single question: it begins possibly with a proper sense of the limited powers of reason and its fallibility; but the mind, unfettered from the fancied slavery of one established tenet, feels a new accession of liberty, and the first disposition, thus recruited, is still more disposed to proceed in the same line of conduct, and being, in this manner, gradually emboldened to make further and more daring advances, it is not wonderful that, at length, many truths, respectable from age and long prescription, should be deemed troublesome and successively discarded as the tyrannical impositions of superstition or bigotry; or that, inflamed by opposition, and flushed with imaginary success and superior penetration, its researches should be concluded, as they too often are, in the utmost licentiousness and libertinism of thought, with a total exclusion of revelation. Superstition covers the chearfullest face with melancholy, and infuses a gloomy apprehension of unknown and inevitable evils into every sentiment and feeling; and these contribute to feed and strengthen the disposition from whence they sprung, investing every trifling occurrence with the importance of an immediate revelation from heaven. Bigotry assumes a petulant obstinacy of look and manners, and gives a tone of pertinacity to the mind, which, soon becoming natural,

creates a spirit of intolerance, and consequent inhumanity and persecution. In opinion, every deviation from rectitude is an additional cause of farther deviation, and the principle alluded to is still more observable in practice. It is ever found that he, who neglects the proper occasions of improving his reason and enlarging his mind by study and reflection, soon feels that the opportunity is lost and his understanding enervated; and he, who partially or carelessly performs his duty, soon finds a growing disinclination to that imperfect performance, which generally terminates in a total neglect. The indulgence of one criminal passion is not only soon familiarised by habit, and loses its moral turpitude, but prepares the way for similar indulgences, equally or probably more criminal, the love of goodness being cooled, and the feelings and principles of action weakened and depraved by a base allowance and admission of wrong. A fraudulent policy, exerted in the accomplishment of any design, must be supported by deceit, which renders a deeper and more intricate fraud necessary to prevent detection; and, as exercise begets ingenuity in any occupation, it thus administers nourishment to itself. A breach of faith in a magistrate naturally begets suspicion in him, the laws become consequently despotic and cruel, and, as wrong is only defensible by wrong, one unjust measure naturally enlists many others equally unjust in its support. But it is superfluous to enumerate more instances: the literal meaning of our Saviour's assertion will have the voluntary subscription of every thinking man, and be allowed to be fairly transcribed from the constitution

tution of nature: "whoever hath not, even that he hath shall be taken from him." It may be more suitable to the present occasion to confine our attention to the allusions in the text, and consider the progress of vice disseminated from two fruitful sources, immoral examples and corrupt doctrines.

Though examples, however eminent and illustrious, ought not to be a rule for governing the opinions and conduct of a being, capable, by a proper cultivation and exercise of his natural faculties, of thinking for himself and forming his own plans of conduct from reason and religion; yet it is unquestionably certain that most people, whether wise or foolish, learned or unlearned, feel an extreme sensibility in their reputation, and a proportionable deference to the public opinion, and consequently to the example of others, whose jurisdiction is extensive, and often uncontrouled, because its sanctions are immediately executed. The most important duties of a teacher consist in instilling good, and correcting bad, principles, which can only be accomplished by the united influence of good example and solemn exhortation. A great portion of mankind are, from poverty or neglect, uneducated and uninformed, and consequently more directed by their animal than rational nature: they are good citizens from fear, and good christians chiefly from precepts and a strong instinctive impulse to imitation, which is naturally directed to their superiors invested, by the public reputation and power, with wisdom, goodness, and authority to instruct; and as example is perhaps with them the only intelligible interpretation of precepts,
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and certainly the only effectual persuasion, their characters and manners will, in some degree, be formed after these models. Nor is the influence of example less extensive with the better informed, who are capable, by a proper application of their acquirements, to form their own creed and be their own guide. A little commerce with the world sufficiently proves that religion, though the most important concern of man, obtains a very inferior place in his affections. Interest and pleasure confer immediate rewards, such as they are, and are pursued with too eager and unremitted attention to leave much room for an object, that claims unrivalled affection, and would interfere with these pursuits; and to these may be added an indolence of mind, and fashionable aversion to any thing so serious as religion, which is therefore only permitted to detain their attention at stated and distant intervals, and is the earnest and constant study of few indeed. To hear with decency and patience, what they know already and have often heard before, is all that can be expected from men devoted to worldly attachments; but intimacy, friendship, and the mutual transactions and intercourse of social life, are acknowledged to make sensible impressions, and gradually to produce a similarity of manners. In the familiar commerce of daily associations and fellowship, an example, connected with ideas of superior information and reverence, will, according as it is virtuous or vicious, at least confirm the well-disposed in their duty, or, in the estimation of the ill-disposed, add a respect to indecorum and irregularity, and confer an
imaginary

After the observations which have occurred in the course of our settlement of the above necessary distinction, most of them tending to shew, that a deep Knowledge of the World is seldom experimentally acquired without much hazard of our virtue, nothing needs be added to prove, that Ecclesiastics cannot safely aim at this acquisition, any farther than as it may be made without too near approaches to the World, and indeed without keeping far a'cof from every scene of actual corruption, or depravity.

The next enquiry proposed was, whether our order, with safety, or propriety, and without using this World so as to abuse it, can adopt those manners, which are understood to be the result of this dangerous Knowledge?—What these manners are cannot, perhaps, be better indicated here than by a representation of those qualities, habits and dispositions, which constitute the characteristics of the *Man of the World*.—Shall we not recognize the more striking lineaments of this portrait in a soft and insinuating address, a gay freedom of expression, an unembarrassed commerce with all ranks of society, an easy and accommodating spirit, a laborious study of external nicety, ornament and taste, a scrupulous attachment to fashion, be it but the fantastic vanity of an hour, an ardent chace after pleasure in youth, after fortune, or ambitious projects in more advanced age, without attention to those principles which ought to direct and moderate these pursuits; an indifference, sincere or affected, towards Religion, which in some persons is to pass for

for philosophy, or the mark of refined education, in others for superior sagacity of nature; must I add to these traits a disposition to sneer at the scruples of such as refuse to conform to all the practices of those they live with, a resolution to improve the present time and circumstance at almost all hazards, and a contempt for the simplicity (as *they* call it) of those, who aided by better principles and taking a more comprehensive view of things, disdain to confine their immortal spirit to a meer sensual existence, and learn to live alike in the past, the present and the future, deriving their virtue and their happiness from all.

If this be a faithful delineation of those manners, which commonly mark the adept in worldly knowledge, it is needless to ask, whether such would naturally, or becomingly unite with the proper demeanor of Ecclesiastics. Much more auspiciously might they meet in that accomplished model of manners formed on the ideas of the noble arbiter of taste and fashion above adverted to: but little will the idolatry "of the graces" add to the decencies of his profession, whose calling it is to minister at the altar of God.

Although, from what has been already offered, no difficulty will probably be made in conceding, that those manners, which are generally understood to result from a Knowledge of the World can with little safety be acquired by Ecclesiastics; perhaps the *impropriety* of their aiming at this acquisition will better appear from other considerations.

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The manners we have been representing—what are they chiefly but the offspring of fashion, and liable to perpetual change (though little moral improvement) with times, places and circumstances?

But can much attention to fashion, to the capricious and transient modes of the World, well become those, whose duty it is, little concerned with the example or imitation of others, strictly to refer *their* actions to the standard of principle, to the laws of Reason and Religion? He, whose eye is fixed wholly upon example, confesses himself a learner, though it be often in a bad school, and never in the best; but let it not be forgotten that the grand purpose of our function is to *teach*. As lights of the World we stand sacredly bound to *give* examples, and such as are conformable to our precepts; be it whose duty it may to follow them.

Though not constituted like the priesthood of the Jews and chosen from one family or tribe, are not we as much selected and set apart from the rest of mankind by our education, our maintenance, the rights and privileges of our ministry, guarded equally by divine and human laws? Are we not an order established under sanctions, the most unquestionably wise and good? Can any persons but of the order established (however others may be tolerated) boast themselves authorised by legal appointment *to speak betwixt God and man*, and to address discourse to all ranks and conditions of the people assembled? And is it not our peculiar business in

these public addresses, as well as in our private admonitions, to turn the thoughts of men from this World to a better, to impress them deeply with the levity and instability of all sublunary objects, and to raise their Affections by every argument we can urge, from things temporal to things eternal?

If such be our character and destination, how strange must appear the contrast betwixt so serious and sacred a profession, and the practice of the light, artificial and pliant, if not of the corrupter manners, of meer men of the World! What subject more likely to provoke the wit, or the malice, of the irreligious and profligate at our expence?

On the other hand, what can afford juster cause of mortification, if not of scandal, to the good conscience and simplicity of the sincere Christian, than to behold the union of qualities so incompatible in the persons of those, whom they would wish to respect, to confide in and to imitate?

The different considerations above adduced, having, I trust, as clearly evinced the impropriety, with which Ecclesiastics would acquire the manners of the World, as the arguments preceding them, have shewn the danger of the acquisition, it will naturally be demanded what those manners are, which, in our ordinary commerce with mankind, it becomes us to exhibit; of what sort and fashion they should be to entitle us, as far as manners are concerned, to the praise of "using this World so as not to abuse it."

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impulse of his disposition, and willingly conclude that it has none, and reject the truth because it is transmitted through an illusive medium; and the well disposed, who is witness to such scenes, so contrary to the dictates of humanity and natural reason, and presumes, from respect to the laws of his country, too great indolence to enquire, or any other reason, that religion is fairly delineated by its professors, must either be an infidel or relinquish his best feelings. Besides the extravagancies of bigotry and fanaticism, which begin in harmless ignorance and credulity, and proceed till every angry passion of the soul be excited and inflamed to a wild destructive frenzy; we see, in our time, similar corruptions, less malignant indeed and pernicious, but which often invade the rights of humanity, and violate the duties of social life. The christian religion itself cannot be embraced with too warm affection, or followed with too zealous obedience; because it is a part in the great system of providential government, which is always benevolent to the human race, and the warmest feelings of the heart are justly due to a Creator, who confers numberless undeserved blessings upon his creatures at present, and consoles their sufferings with the pleasing hope of future happiness. But an importance is often imputed to civil and ecclesiastical regulations, as if they were a part of revelation itself: and this disproportionate attachment naturally transfers the affection and zeal, due only to religion, to external formularies, and is daily seen, like a hostile rivalry in the favour of an earthly patron, to beget coolness, antipathies, malevolence, and hatred, between

christians

christians of different denominations, who are perhaps only discriminated from each other by an allowance or rejection of tenets, never intended to be the objects of reason, and therefore no proper objects of contention, or an obedience, or disobedience, to human formularies which are no part of revelation, were ordained merely for the preservation of civil peace and the safety of civil government, and are left to the free election of all. Men are too apt to forget that the christian religion is addressed to the intention and first springs of action, and that its distinguishing mark is a mild indulgent charity. A comparison between external forms, and a rational conscientious preference, can only result from their different degrees of coincidence with the spirit of christianity to raise the attention, and warm the heart with pure devotion; and all bitter and angry zeal is widely different from that universal benevolence, and mutual forbearance and toleration of human errors, which it describes to be most important. It is as little to be apprehended that God will condemn a man possessed of christian charity, as expected that every other virtue will save him without it.

Permit me to add a few reflections to what I have said:

1. As vice is, from the constitution of nature, calculated to diffuse itself, and one false step is naturally the forerunner of many more; and emphatically immorality of life and corruption of religion, spread their contagion far and wide, and tend to create new errors in endless succession; it is peculiarly incumbent upon every teacher to take heed both to himself and the

the principles of his doctrine. In the infancy of the church, christianity prevailed, without the assistance of rhetoric and worldly wisdom, against the combined influence of the strongest worldly motives, pleasure, riches, and power; it overthrew the dominion of passions, prejudices, and habits, and forced its way in opposition to the supreme government, always suspicious and cruel; and it may be presumed from hence, that the genuine word of God and examples corresponding with it, are irresistible without any pious fraud or policy, which are not only wrong but calculated to defeat their own designs. Every fraud employed in the service of a good cause, will hurt it when discovered; and it is no easy question in casuistry to decide in what situations, or whether in any, policy may be adopted for the promotion of truth; but, if ever allowed, it ought to be pure and simple, disinterested and upright, like truth itself. A worldly intriguing policy may remove an immediate difficulty, or promote a momentary success, but ultimately it must be ruinous to a good cause, and should never be employed but in the ministry of injustice and imposition.

2. It is not only repugnant to the spirit of christianity, but dangerous, to adopt with pertinacity, and dispute with intemperate warmth about any equivocal and doubtful tenets, upon abstruse or unintelligible questions; because errors naturally contribute to their own support, and one delusion prepares the way for more, till religion be lost in the heat and pride of argument. And when any bold unhallowed opinions are delivered to the world with apparent sincerity and zeal, and seemingly a firm
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conviction of their truth, in the author, and even corroborated by the awful approbation of his latest moments, deliberately and willingly subscribed; still let it be remembered that sincerity is no infallible criterion of truth, for there does not exist a vice however enormous, or opinion however wild and destructive, that has not been patronized by men of unquestionable sincerity, if we may believe their own professions. A life begun in error and delusion will, from the constitution of things, probably be continued, and end as it began. It would be a strange and inexplicable paradox that different, and sometimes opposite, opinions should be formed upon the same subject, were it not considered that a man's understanding may be progressively disordered by his peculiar mode of life and conversation, and an irregular indulgence of his predominant passions, inclination, or interest, so as to mistake the difference between right and wrong, good and evil.

3. It is the duty of every minister of the gospel of peace to heal the divisions, and sooth the animosities so prevalent between different sects of christians, because they probably do not differ in any fundamentals that are, or were intended to be, objects of reason; they only exercise a privilege which every good government hath deemed politic to allow; and to act otherwise is to oppose the charitable spirit of christianity, and to debase a divine revelation by an impure mixture of worldly ingredients. If religion offer conditional happiness, and propose the conditions, the supremacy of power, or wisdom of councils, cannot alter them. They act within their proper sphere when they

they frame regulations and prescribe laws, not inconsistent with the letter or spirit of religion, for the sake of public peace and good government; but any farther attempts, whether arising from the pride of superior reason, or despotic spirit of bigotry, are not only impious, but impolitic. Religion itself, unadulterated by human inventions, is too strong to be shaken; but many things have been annexed by the infidel to undermine, and the believer to support, it, which are foreign and untenable. A man predisposed by a bad life, to wish well to infidelity, will gladly allow a tenet, not derived from scripture, to be part of the canon and essential to christianity, because the subversion of that is the only mischief in his power, as it may tend to weaken the principal, of which it pretends, and is perhaps allowed, to be an auxiliary. But it is an insidious and feeble sophistry to arraign the falsehood and absurdity of human opinions and tenets, allied and deemed subsidiary to a cause, which disclaims the alliance and wants no support; and, however fashionable the practice may be, it is in truth a harmless, though very ill-natured, infidelity to traduce a religion, which avowedly employs no powers incompatible with human nature and the general constitution of things, because some of its advocates have been weak or wicked.



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